

Testimony regarding House Bill #6380.

My name is Chris Drury, I am a resident of Glastonbury, and I am here to speak out against House Bill 6380, which will split the Board of Education Services of the Blind agency and consolidate the Children's Services division within the Department of Education.

My daughter, Paige, is seven years old and is totally blind. She currently receives services through BESB, including Braille instruction with a teacher for the visually impaired and mobility instruction with an orientation and mobility specialist. She has been receiving services through BESB since she was two years old.

Paige is a very bright, energetic child who loves to learn. She attends public elementary school in Glastonbury and is completely mainstreamed with her sighted peers. She reads and writes in Braille and I think the services and instruction that Paige has received from BESB has helped her immensely. I am very concerned that the services Paige receives would be significantly reduced if BESB were eliminated, and the Children's Services division folded into the Department of Education.

I believe that BESB is uniquely qualified to provide services for the blind. The instructors at BESB are highly trained and do an amazing job teaching the children. The directors of BESB understand the specific needs of the blind and are in the best position to address those needs. It makes sense to keep all of the services for the blind within one agency rather than divide the agency and have services for one group being provided by one state agency and services for a different group being provided by an entirely different agency. Dividing BESB will likely lead to a reduction in services to children and adults. It also seems unlikely that there would be any actual cost savings given that two separate agencies would be responsible for providing services that are currently provided by a single agency.

As you consider whether to vote for this Bill, I ask you to consider the needs of the blind children of Connecticut, like Paige, and the impact that eliminating BESB will have on the services provided to those children.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address the committee and I hope you will vote against the Bill.